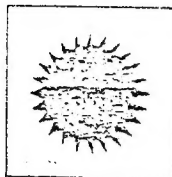


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Explosion over Nicaragua

Congress bitterly rebukes Reagan after reports of CIA-directed minelaying



The physical damage wrought so far by the mines that *contra* guerrillas took responsibility for sowing inside the harbors of Marxist Nicaragua would hardly be noticed in a declared war. The highest reported tally: six Nicaraguan vessels and six ships of five other nations damaged but none confirmed sunk; ten sailors seriously injured but no one killed.

The political damage caused by the mining and by subsequent revelations that the American CIA had directed and supervised it from a mother ship off Nicaragua's Pacific coast is on another order of magnitude altogether. A troublesome rift has opened in the nation's alliances, symbolized by a French offer to help sweep the mines from Nicaraguan waters. The U.S. has been put on the defensive in world forums, first casting a veto in the

United Nations Security Council against a complaint by Nicaragua's Sandinista government about the mining and other U.S.-financed *contra* activities, then declaring last week that the U.S. will not accept the jurisdiction of the World Court on protests filed by Nicaragua.

But the loudest and by far most serious detonation of all went off in Congress. Enraged by a feeling that they had been misled about the Administration's Central American policy, and deeply worried about where that policy is leading, the Senate passed by a landslide vote of 84 to 12 a nonbinding resolution demanding that no U.S. money be used to mine Nicaraguan waters. Arizona Republican Barry Goldwater voiced his colleagues' anger and dismay in an astonishingly pungent letter to CIA Director William Casey. Said Mr. Conservative: "I am pissed off . . . The President has asked us to back his foreign policy. Bill, how can we back his

foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing? Lebanon, yes, we all knew that he sent troops over there. But mine the harbors of Nicaragua? This is an act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me, I don't see how we are going to explain it."

The fury of the response was startling. The mining was anything but secret, suspicions of CIA involvement were worldwide, and Administration briefings had offered Congress at least the opportunity to confirm them before the press did. Nonetheless, though Goldwater inexplicably voted against the antimining resolution, which was offered by Massachusetts Democrat Ted Kennedy, 42 of the Senate's controlling Republicans, including even Reagan's friend and campaign chairman, Paul Laxalt of Nevada, voted for it. Crowded California Democrat Alan Cranston: "The President asked for a bipartisan foreign policy. He's now got it." Reagan supporters closed ranks to make a House vote on an identical resolution closer and more partisan, but still it passed, 281 to 111. Said Daniel Ortega Saavedra, coordinator of the Sandinista junta: "We appreciate the efforts, the United States Congress has made against the undeclared war the United States is waging against Nicaragua."

If the congressional rebellion stopped there, the White House could live with its consequences. Administration officials insisted that the mining had ceased more than a week before the Senate vote, and it would not have been resumed in any case. Reagan's supporters even struck a deal with Kennedy, under which the Senator withdrew a motion condemning U.S. refusal to accept World Court jurisdiction on Central American questions, and the White House in return made no effort to defeat the antimining resolution.

But many Senators and Representatives are determined to go further and cut off all U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan *contras*, crippling if not ending the guerrilla war they are waging inside Nicaragua. There the fighting intensified last week, with the *contras* launching coordinated attacks from across the Honduran border in the north and along the swampy Costa Rican border to the south. Fighting was especially fierce at the southern town of San Juan del Norte, where the rebels were hoping to establish a provisional government. *Contra* commanders told TIME that they

Congressional critics: House Speaker O'Neill; Senator Goldwater



Executive targets: President Reagan; CIA Director Casey

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